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ABSTRACT

This proposal examines the formation of the Carnegie Library at Union Springs, Alabama, in the context of the rural society from which it grew. It is suggested that the availability of detailed research into the dynamics of this library's formation may help historians identify factors that support the advent of public libraries, regardless of their locations, and may assist the library profession to better articulate methods to help floundering public libraries. It is proposed that several independent variables be examined in varying depth, including: (1) the confluence of Carnegie's philanthropy with the local philanthropic impulse and civic pride; (2) local leadership from elected officials, library association members, and community leaders; (3) the presence of supporters of the local subscription library and their backgrounds; (4) the presence of enough wealth in the county to support Carnegie's matching funds requirement; (5) the backing of the local newspaper; (6) the influence of populism; and (7) the presence of general cultural factors--e.g., the public library movement throughout the southeast, the growth of public education, and the relative lack of racial and political turmoil. (22 references) (SD)

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CARNEGIE COMES TO UNION SPRINGS
THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ALABAMA PUBLIC LIBRARY

A Research Proposal
by
A.J. Wright

May 1990

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction/Background	page 1
Research Problem	5
Literature Review	9
Methodology	10
Data Analysis	11
Limitations	13
Appendix: Literature Review Bibliography	14

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

On January 18, 1911, the Union Springs Herald announced to a no doubt waiting readership that "Mr. Carnegie (is) Heard From." Thus the seat of Bullock County became the tenth community of an even dozen in Alabama to receive and utilize a grant from the Johnny Appleseed of public libraries. On the promise that Union Springs would provide at least ten percent of the grant amount per year toward operating expenses, the town was awarded $7000 (the smallest of the Alabama grants) for construction of the building to house a public library.

A library was not a new institution in Union Springs. In September 1894 the "Ladies Lyceum" was organized to establish a public library in the town. In February 1896 the subscription library opened to the public; the membership fee was two dollars per year. The collection contained 332 books classified, arranged and cataloged by Mollie Norman. Miss Norman was to be a seminal force behind the Union Springs library movement. She held various offices in the Ladies Lyceum over the years, including several terms as President. In 1905 she reorganized the collection according to the Dewey system.

The next major step in the transition to a Carnegie library occured in 1908. At that time the Union Springs Library Association was chartered and the Ladies Lyceum handed over duties connected with the subscription library to that group. In April of the following year the new group petitioned the city council for an annual appropriation to support the library's operating expenses. The council agreed to authorize a $1000 per

year for those costs if a $10,000 building could be constructed to house a public library.

In 1910 the Library Association made initial contact with the Carnegie library program. In November 1910, before word came from Carnegie, the Association elected its first paid librarian---Mollie Norman. Miss Norman was lucky enough to have three young ladies as unpaid "apprentices."

By the time of the grant announcement, the subscription library housed more than 1200 volumes and was open five days a week for two hours each day. The collection was apparently put to use; the Union Springs Herald of the period regularly listed both missing and newly added books. In her first annual report Miss Norman reported that during 1911 more than 1400 circulations were made and 199 borrowers cards issued. June was the heaviest month; two hundred and seven items were circulated.

After Carnegie had committed a grant, the pace of events began to quicken. The Library Association began to raise the $3000 difference between the grant amount and the city council's requirement; by the end of August 1911 over $2500 had been raised, with almost 200 individual, business, club and lodge contributions ranging from 25¢ to $500. On November 8 the cornerstone for the building was laid in what the Herald described as an "impressive ceremony." The library's plans were equally impressive. The basement was to contain an auditorium, a stage, dressing room, a furnace and storage room. The library proper would house reading and reference rooms, a children's department, the librarian's office,

work and stack rooms and a restroom. The Library Association announced its desire to make the building particularly attractive to children, with plans for a story hour. The Association also made the following invitation: "We wish to encourage the working people and those who cannot afford libraries of their own to come to us for entertainment and knowledge."

The building was finished and opened to the public almost exactly a year after the cornerstone was laid. On November 25, 1912, the formal dedication ceremony was held; and Union Springs' public library, "which will be absolutely free to all white people of Bullock County" was open at last. Mollie Norman, who had worked so tirelessly and who supervised the move to the new building, must have been pleased.

* * *

Andrew Carnegie's amazing library philanthropy was conducted in two phases. The first covered the period 1886 to 1896; during this "retail" phase Carnegie gave fourteen buildings to six cities in grants totalling more than 1.8 million dollars. The second, "wholesale" period lasted from 1898 to 1919; more than 1400 communities received over thirty-nine million dollars for the construction of library buildings.

The grant to Union Springs thus arrived in about the middle of the "wholesale" period of philanthropy. The state of Alabama, with its twelve Carnegie libraries, ranked thirty-first among the forty-six states that received Carnegie grants. Three Alabama communities---Birmingham, Mobile and Greenville---were offered sizeable grants ($100,000; $50,000; and $10,000 respectively) but refused the money.

The reason for these refusals are unclear, but may have been connected with Carnegie's requirement that a community earmark ten percent of the grant amount for the library's annual operating expenses.

The building plan for the Carnegie library at Union Springs seems to have followed the general outline of those in James Bertram's Notes on Library Buildings, which was sent to Carnegie grant recipients beginning in 1911. In that year, due to past problems, the Carnegie Corporation began to exert more control over the consturction of library buildings. Union Springs was apparently affected by this policy change.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

In an article published in 1945, Jesse H. Shera quotes William I. Fletcher, then librarian at Amherst, on the origin of the public library movement:

> ...it is easy to perceive that in the establishment of these subscription libraries, the public-library movement really began. From the first these institutions were for the benefit, not of the few, but of the many. In most cases the fees were so small that they were supposed not to deter any from joining the association.

Fletcher's observation on the movement as a whole can be applied verbatim to the specific case of Union Springs.

Mary Anders, in her history of public library service in the southeast, notes that the decade of 1890-1899 was the period a public library movement began in the region. Anders also points out that women's clubs were very important to that movement's growth. Here again a general observation can be applied to Union Springs.

In the article noted above, Shera poses a number of questions pertinent to any study of a single library's formation:

> One must ask simply and directly: What were the influences that brought the library into being? How deeply was the library rooted in a conscious need? Did it result from the spontaneous enthusiasm of the populace, or did it come from the untiring efforts of a few? Who were the people who really promoted the demand for free library service, and what were their motives in so doing? To what extent did the idea of the public library become incorporated in the mores so that it grew to be a hallmark of municipal progress and civic distinction? What was the real part played by philanthropy? Was it the deus ex machina that saved the library during its formative period, or was it no more than an

> ornamental superstructure imposed upon an institution the permanence of which was already assured? To what degree did the library signalize the spread of socialism in its assumption by the body politic of a function in the execution of which private enterprise had been largely a failure? Was the library a cause or an effect of social change? How was it related to the spread of popular education? Finally, of all the social and geographic phenomena by which the library was surrounded, which were related to it and which were not...

The work of these authors, and others, as well as the general background noted in the introduction, leads to the formulation of an hypothesis concerning Union Springs' Carnegie library. In 1910 over seventy-six percent of the land area of Bullock County was in agricultural use. Almost ninety percent of those farms were less than one hundred acres in size; more than half were between twenty and forty-nine acres. The average value of all property per farm in the county was $1141. The population in 1910 was 30,196; the number of people in Union Springs itself came to 4055. Union Springs was the second-smallest community in Alabama to receive a Carnegie grant; only Decatur had fewer people at the time of the grant. Due to this very modest wealth, small population and overwhelmingly agricultural basis of Bullock County society in 1910 and earlier, development of the Carnegie library in Union Springs was probably the result of a few dedicated community members working over a period of a decade an d a half.

A few histories of individual Carnegie libraries, both in the south and elsewhere, have already been written. Unfortunately, these studies seem to focus primarily on the entire history of each library rather than the relationship between its formation and social milieu.

Furthermore, no study has examined the formation of an individual library in Alabama, Carnegie or otherwise. This study proposes to examine the Carnegie library at Union Springs and its formation in the context of the rural society out of which it grew.

That such a small town was able to originate and support a Carnegie library is interesting enough in itself. Detailed historical research into the dynamics behind this particular library, located in a setting devoid of some variables present in larger communities, may help historians isolate those factors behind the appearance of all public libraries whatever their location. Understanding what contributes to the creation of libraries may also help the library profession to better articulate methods to help floundering public libraries and to improve public libraries generally. Fianlly, this research into a single library's beginnings will in a small way further advance Jesse Shera's goal of "...progress...toward a better understanding of the library in its true relation to the entirety of human life."

In order to test the hypothesis concerning the Union Springs Carnegie library, a number of independent varables will have to be examined in varying detail. These variables are enumerated and briefly discussed below.

1. Philanthropy

   The confluence of Carnegie's philanthropy with the local philanthropic impulse and civic pride

2. Local leadership

   From elected officials, Library Association members and other community leaders

3. Subscription library

The presence of supporters of the local subscription library and their backgrounds (income, occupation, etc.)

4. Degree of local wealth

The presence of enough wealth in the county to support Carnegie's matching funds requirement

5. Union Springs Herald

The backing of the local weekly newspaper. Involved at least moral support and publicity, including frequent reporting---often on the front page---of the Library Association's activities and efforts to secure a Carnegie grant and raise the building

6. Populism

This political philosophy---which emphasized the needs of the common man over those of industrial capitalism---had gained enormous popularity in Alabama in the 1890s. Although populism collapsed as a political threat in the south in 1896, the sentiments articulated by the movement remained.

7. General cultural factors

Concurrent public library movement throughout the southeast. Growth of public education in Alabama. Relative lack of racial and political turmoil in Bullock County and Alabama.

By examining these varables a clear picture of the formation of the Carnegie library at Union Springs should emerge.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In view of the numerous libraries constructed in this country with Carnegie grant, very few studies of individual libraries have been completed. As noted before, no studies have focused on individual Carnegie libraries in Alabama.

The principal sources searched for previously-published material relevant to this proposal were Michael Harris and Donald Davis, American Library History: A Bibliography (1978) and the Library Literature index. The pertinent sources found are listed in the appendix to this proposal.

This review of the literature reveals a paucity of studies on individual Carnegie libraries in both Alabama and the rest of the nation. The completion of this proposed research will hopefully provide a model which future studies on the formation of other Carnegie libraries can follow.

METHODOLOGY

The procedures of this study will involve research in various types of material and places with a goal of finding information concerning the independent varables noted above. Travel will be required for "fishing expeditions" into any pertinent materials in the Alabama State Archives, Bullock County probate records and the Union Springs library; and for any interviews with individuals that are deemed necessary. Important materials to be examined in the University of Alabama Main Library include issues of the Union Springs Herald (1894-1912) and U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1900 Population Schedules, Bullock County, Alabama (microfilm). The interlibrary loan services at the University of Alabama Library can also be utilized to obtain the Carnegie Library Correspondence Microfilm Collection, certain items identified in the literature review and materials on social, economic and political conditions in Alabama, 1890-1910, not available in the University of Alabama Library System.

Detailed examination of these sources will provide material on the history of Union Springs and its Library Association; the cultural, social, political and economic conditions of Bullock County in the two decades under consideration; the status of public education in that county and the entire state during the same time frame; and the income, occupation, etc., of supporters of both the library fund and the Library Association in Union Springs. This information will provide a profile of the community out of which a Carnegie library grew.

DATA ANALYSIS

In order to analyze and evaluate the data gathered, the independent variables will be reformulated into a question format during this stage. This process should help clarify the interaction, or lack of it, among the independent variables; and the relative importance of each varable should emerge. At the end of this procedure, the hypothesis can be either confirmed or rejected. Whatever the fate of that hypothesis, a clear picture of the formation of the Carnegie library at Union Springs will be formed.

The questions generated at this stage will include the following:

1. How did the idea of a Carnegie grant originate in Union Springs? Who were its backers? Issues of the Herald for the 1908-1911 period and correspondence with the Carnegie corporation should help answer this one.

2. Who were the community members involved in the Library Association and what overlap existed between this group and contributors to the library fund? Names of these two groups were published in the Herald; their incomes, occupations, ages, sex, etc., may be found in census and probate records.

3. What were the relationships between individual members of the two groups named above and the various institutions of Union Springs---the city and county governments, the schools, churches, lodges, clubs, businesses, Herald, etc.?

4. What was the status of public education in Bullock County during the period 1890-1910? What support did public education receive from the populace? How many students were enrolled?

5. To what extent did populist philosophy influence events/thinking in Bullock County during those same two decades?

Depending on the amount of data generated in the research phase, quantitative analysis might be appropriate on such items as the proportion of the county's wealth contributed to the Carnegie library building fund, the profile of an "average" individual contributor and so forth. Unfortunately, a detailed outline of useful statistical procedures cannot be made until the necessary data is known to exist. Based on the material examined for this proposal, the possibility of using some analysis of statistics is likely.

Whether or not quantitative analysis is possible in this study, "data reduction" will nonetheless be performed. The amount of material generated from research will require much synthesis in order to place it effectively within the confines of the independent variables.

LIMITATIONS

Limits of this study will fall into a pair of broad categories, internal and external. Naturally, the information found via research, or the lack of information, may limit conclusions that can be made regarding some of the independent variables and the hypothesis. The material utilized will also have to be evaluated to adjust for possible omissions, contradictions and so forth.

Due to various social, cultural and economic differences between the south and the other regions of the country in the time frame under consideration, the factors resulting in the presence of a Carnegie library in a small community in Alabama may not be completely applicable or present elsewhere. Differences among states in the south may also limit applicability of the results of this study to other areas of the region.

These limitations are the standard ones within which all historians must work. With persistent research, an unwillingness to jump to conclusions and careful evaluation of data gathered, the limits can be overcome to a great extent.

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Union Springs Herald

1911

January 4 "Missing Books"
January 11 "The Library"
January 18 "Mr. Carnegie Heard From"
February 1 "Library News"
March 15 "Plans and Purposes of the Union Springs Library"

March 22	"New Books"
June 14	"Work on Library Will Commence Soon"
July 5	"Library Notice"
August 9	"Corner Stone Laying"
August 30	"Library Fund"
November 1	"Corner Stone Will Be Laid Monday"
November 8	"Corner Stone Laid With Impressive Ceremony"
November 22	"Library Progress"
December 20	"Main Points in History of Union Springs Library"

1912

February 7	"First Annual Report of the Librarian"
September 4	"Library Building Formally Accepted"
November 27	"Library Building Formally Dedicated"

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